

Opaque sliding panels open to reveal the staircase and the raised sleeping platform, as well as providing privacy.



Living Small Is the Next Big Thing

Cheaper to run, easier to maintain, and less taxing on the environment—small-footprint housing is becoming the first choice for people across the globe.

In cities around the world, architects and designers are being tasked with creating increasingly tiny spaces. Individuals, couples, and families alike are losing interest in the scale of properties offered by the suburbs and choosing instead to live in smaller spaces closer to the heart of the urban action.

Choosing to live small is not a new phenomenon. For decades, architects have been striving to streamline the smallest spaces into efficient yet delightful “machines for living,” ranging from Le Corbusier’s 15m² (161 ft²) Cabanon on the Côte d’Azur to Kisho Kurokawa’s pioneering—if ultimately unsuccessful—effort, the Nakagin Capsule Tower in Tokyo. Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, skyscrapers and apartment blocks have taken over the urban skyline in conurbations such as London, New York, Shanghai, Tokyo, Hong Kong, and São Paulo, offering small-footprint accommodation to a range of demographics.

As populations continue to grow and land on which to build gets scarcer, rents and house prices have skyrocketed, creating an overheated market that can’t meet demand.

Even after the Covid-19 pandemic turned cities into ghost towns, pausing all of their joys and exposing their limitations, the market’s upward trajectory has never wavered. The much-maligned office lives on, albeit part time, and the cultural hubbub of restaurants, theaters, and museums in city centers continues to enthrall. Despite all the downsides, people are still prepared to sacrifice space for the thrill of a central

location, the buzz of a vibrant neighborhood, and easy access to shops and public transport.

This trend can be seen as part of a cultural shift led by millennials, dubbed the “cheapest generation” by *The Atlantic* in 2012. With the Great Recession in 2007–2009 reducing incomes and job security, and the rise of the sharing economy making everything from cars to clothes available to rent, this generation came of age without their parents’ capacity to get on the property ladder, or, indeed, the same interest in doing so.

Instead, this is a generation that values experiences over possessions, and finds jobs that offer a four-day week more attractive than those offering a company car. Similarly, a smaller home that is cheap to buy or rent and maintain, close to both the office and the airport, as well as the social, functional, and cultural amenities of a city, is a more attractive prospect than a larger, more expensive home that requires a commute.

And it’s not just millennials. People from all demographics are investigating different ways of living smaller, and their reasons are financial, social, environmental, ethical, and practical. Young people looking for community are finding it in co-living spaces, while individuals looking for something specific are commissioning architects to build it bespoke. Family units are repurposing their garages while developers are snapping up tiny gaps between houses to build skinny homes. In response to the absence of obvious solutions to the dearth of urban housing, architects and designers are creating a panoply of creative innovations that stretch